

## **Stop Violating English Language Learners (ELLs) Educational and Civil Rights in Connecticut Schools!**

I question the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Board members and the Commissioner of Education, Mr. Stefan Pryor, why is it that *Bilingual Education Programs* have been ignored, eliminated, and attacked in many of the schools where it is mandated to be provided and budgeted per *Connecticut Bilingual Educational Statutes, Sec.10-17? SDE: Bilingual Education Statute*. The State Board of Education has a clear *Position Statement and Guidelines for Policymakers* on the education of English language learners (ELLs), or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, [SDE Position Statement and Guidelines for Educating ELLs.pdf](#) but these are being ignored in many districts. ELLs are students who lack sufficient mastery of English “*to assure equal educational opportunity in the regular school program.*” The United States Office of Civil Rights (OCR) is clear that educational agencies must recognize and address ELL students’ educational rights. *Literally hundreds of scientific studies over the past half century have shown that bilingual education – when well designed and well implemented – is an effective approach for teaching second language learners.* [NABE - Bilingual Education](#)

Yet, the SDE and many school and district administrators in Connecticut express that Bilingual or English as a Second language (ESL) programs, exist in their districts, but if you visit them you’ll see that they exist only on paper, (including grants submitted to the SDE), but not in reality in the schools. In many cases it is evident that the result of this is the over-identification of ELL students, especially Hispanics, in Special Education Programs, disregarding the fact that to know another language is an asset and not a disability. It is also impacting the dropout rate in high schools, and in the number of disciplinary referrals of ELL students. Many educators lack knowledge in learning a second language versus the first. Learning a second language is a difficult process that takes time and research-based approaches are needed, especially when learning academic language. Teachers and administrators who service ELL students in their schools should understand and support this process rather than reject it.

The SDE staff expresses the eagerness to close the achievement gap between high performing white students and low performing minority students (including ELLs in Connecticut, which has the highest gap of all states in the nation. SDE does this by hiring Dr. Steven Adamowski, as a high paid “*special master*” to dictate to the neediest districts’ Boards of Education and Superintendents on what to do, including Bilingual/Two Way Bilingual programs which this individual eliminated as Superintendent in Hartford, and where OCR needed to be involved due to the lack of Bilingual/ESL appropriate services to ELL students. This same “master” is making similar decisions and mistakes in Windham, New London, and the CSDE that are not beneficial for ELL students and their families. What the “special master” and the Commissioner of

Education are doing is collapsing positions and integrating Bilingual/ESL Departments in districts with Special Education Departments, such as in New London. Effective educators who know the needs of these two different student populations would not recommend such a disservice to the two distinct student populations. This decision had nothing to do with servicing special education or ELL students, but to save money and destroy programs. Do not be misled when they call it "re-structured". It is ironic that we need to remind and refresh the memories of the decision makers at the SDE of American history where "*Masters*" were eliminated with the abolishment of slavery.

Why are the SDE and many districts turning their backs when ELL students' educational and civil rights are violated daily in Connecticut's schools? Why can't the SDE have the appropriate staff to monitor districts rather than U.S. Department Office of Civil Rights having to get involved? The skills necessary for today's jobs are more sophisticated and complex than many years ago when the only jobs available were unskilled jobs. Language and academic needs of ELL students must be addressed in Connecticut. These students and native speakers of English will be better prepared for many of the present and future work force where *bilingualism* is a must!

Sara V. Oyola-Bowman, South Windsor, Connecticut  
Retired Bilingual/Bicultural Connecticut Educator  
Connecticut Educational Consultant